

*Legislation will be one of first bills signed by President Obama
Follows through on commitment to improve health care for 11th District families*

(Washington, DC) -

Congresswoman Debbie Halvorson today voted for legislation to provide health care to 11 million children in lower-income families. The State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) Reauthorization Act had bipartisan support and was approved by a vote of 289-139. The bill is very similar to the legislation that President Bush vetoed twice in the 110th Congress.

"This is exactly the sort of legislation I was sent to Congress to work on. Every child should be able to see a doctor. Period. With so many families losing health insurance because of unemployment, this legislation helps us meet our obligation to care for our children," Halvorson said.

This bipartisan bill reauthorizes the State Children's Health Insurance Program through FY 2013 and preserves coverage for all 7.1 million children currently covered by SCHIP, including preserving the coverage of 345,576 children in Illinois. SCHIP was created in 1997 to provide health care coverage for children in families that earn too little to afford health insurance for their children or themselves, but too much to qualify for Medicaid.

The bill also extends health care coverage to 4.1 million additional low-income children, who are currently uninsured.

The bill is fully paid for - raising the tobacco tax by 61 cents. Raising the tobacco tax also promotes children's health - by discouraging children from smoking. According to the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, a 61-cent increase in the tobacco tax means that 1,873,000 fewer children will take up smoking.

Halvorson commented, 'This legislation will help put prevention first. If our kids see doctors regularly, they'll get very sick much less often. If we can prevent children from having to make a trip the emergency room, they're going to be healthier, and we're going to keep the cost of health care down.'

"I'm proud to have done my part in getting this important legislation ready for President Obama's signature. I worked with the President-elect in the Illinois Senate to improve health care for Illinois kids, and I'm very happy to continue this work now at the federal level."